

BOB HAMPTON of PLACER

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CHAPTER I. Hampton, of Placer.

It was not an uncommon tragedy of the west. If slightest chronicle of it survive, it must be discovered among the dusty and nearly forgotten records of the Eighteenth regiment of infantry.

Yet the tale is worth telling now, when such days are past and gone. There were 16 of them when, like so many hunted rabbits, they were first securely trapped among the frowning rocks, and forced relentlessly backward from off the narrow trail until the precipitous canyon walls finally halted their disorganized flight, and from sheer necessity compelled a rally in hopeless battle. Sixteen—ten infantrymen from old Fort Bethune, one command of Syd Wyman, a gray-headed sergeant of 30 years' continuous service in the regulars, two cowpunchers from the "Xl" ranch, a stranger who had joined them uninvited at the ford over the Bear Water, together with old Gillis, the post-trader, and his silent chit of a girl.

Sixteen—but that was three days before, and in the meanwhile not a few of those speeding Sioux bullets had found softer billet than the limestone rocks. Six of the soldiers, four already dead, two dying, lay outstretched in ghastly silence where they fell.

Then the taciturn Gillis gave sudden utterance to a sobbing cry, and a burst of red spurted across his white beard as he reeled backward, knocking the girl prostrate when he fell. Eight remained, one helpless, one a mere lass of 15. It was the morning of the third day.

The beginning of the affair had burst upon them so suddenly that no two in that stricken company would have told the same tale. None among them had anticipated trouble.

In all the fancied security of unquestioned peace these chance travelers had slowly toiled along the steep trail leading toward the foothills. Gillis and the girl, as well as the two cattleherders, were on horseback; the remainder soberly trudged forward on foot, with guns slung to their shoulders. Wyman was somewhat in advance, walking beside the stranger, the latter a man of uncertain age, smoothly shaven, quietly dressed in garments bespeaking an eastern tailor, a bit grizzled of hair along the temples, and possessing a pair of cool, gray eyes. He had introduced himself by the name of Hampton, but had volunteered no further information, nor was it customary in that country to question impudently.

Hampton, through the medium of easy conversation, early discovered in the sergeant an intelligent mind, possessing some knowledge of literature. They had been discussing books with rare enthusiasm, and the former had drawn from the concealment of an inner pocket a diminutive copy of "The Merchant of Venice," from which he was reading aloud a disputed passage, when the faint trail they followed suddenly dipped into the yawning mouth of a black canyon. It was a narrow, gloomy, contracted gorge, a mere gash between those towering hills shadowing its depths on either hand. A swift mountain stream, noisy and clear as crystal, dashed from rock to rock close beside the more northern wall, while the ill-defined pathway, strewn with bowlders and guarded by underbrush, clung to the opposite side, where low scrub trees partially obscured the view.

All was silent as death when they entered, yet they had barely advanced a short hundred paces when those apparently bare rocks in front flamed red, the narrow defile echoed with wild screeches and became instantly crowded with weird, leaping figures. It was like a plunge from heaven into hell. Blaine and Endicott sank at the first fire, while Wyman's stricken arm dripped blood. Indeed, under that sudden shock, he fell, and was barely rescued by the prompt action of the man beside him. Dropping the opened book, and firing madly to left and right with a revolver which appeared to spring into his hand as by magic, the latter coolly dragged the fainting soldier across the more exposed space, until the two found partial security among a mass of loosened rocks littering the base of the precipice. The others who survived that first scorching discharge also raced toward this same shelter, impelled thereto by the unerring instinct of border fighting, and flinging themselves flat behind protecting bowlders, began responding to the hot fire rained upon them.

Scattered and hurled as these first volleys were, they proved sufficient to check the howling demons in the open. It has never been Indian nature to face unprotected the aim of the white men, and those dark figures, which only a moment before thronged the narrow gorge, leaping crazily in the riot of apparent victory, suddenly melted from sight, sinking down into leafy coverts beside the stream or into holes among the rocks, like so many vanishing prairie dogs. Now and then a slinky brown arm might incautiously project across the gleaming surface of a rock, or a mop of coarse, black hair appear above the edge of a gully, either incident resulting in a quick interchange of fire. That was all; yet the experienced frontiersmen knew that eyes as keen as those of any wild animal of the jungle were watching murderously their slightest movement. Wyman, now reclining in agony against the base of the overhanging

cliff, directed the movements of his little command calmly and with sober military judgment. Little by little, under protection of the rifles of the three civilians, the uninjured infantrymen crept cautiously about, rolling loosened bowlders forward into position, until they finally succeeded in thus erecting a rude barricade between them and the enemy. The wounded who could be reached were laboriously drawn back within this improvised shelter, and when the black shadows of the night finally shut down, all remaining alive were once more clustered together, the injured lying moaning and ghastly beneath the overhanging shelf of rock, and the girl, who possessed all the patient stoicism of frontier training, resting in silence, her widely opened eyes on those far-off stars peeping above the brink of the chasm, her head pillowed on old Gillis' knee.

Twice during the long night volunteers sought vainly to pierce those



Hampton Fired Madly Right and Left.

lines of savage watchers. A long, wailing cry of agony from out the thick darkness told the fate of their first messenger, while Casey, of the "Xl," crept slowly, painfully back, with an Indian bullet embedded deep in his shoulder. Just before the coming of dawn, Hampton, without uttering a word, calmly turned up the collar of his tightly buttoned coat, so as better to conceal the white collar he wore, gripped his revolver between his teeth, and crept like some wriggling snake among the black rocks and through the dense underbrush in search after water. By some miracle of divine mercy he was permitted to pass unscathed, and came crawling back, a dozen hastily filled canteens dangling across his shoulders. It was like nectar to those parched, feverish throats; but of food barely a mouthful of a piece remained in the haversacks.

The second day dragged onward, its hours bringing no change for the better, no relief, no slightest ray of hope. The hot sun scorched them pitilessly, and two of the wounded died delirious. From dawn to dark there came no slackening of the savage watchfulness which held the survivors helpless behind their coverts. The merest up-lifting of a head, the slightest movement of a hand, was sufficient to demonstrate how sharp were those savage eyes.

Another long, black night followed, during which, for an hour or so in turn, the weary defenders slept, tossing uneasily, and disturbed by fearful dreams. Then gray and solemn, amid the lingering shadows of darkness, dawned the third dread day of unequal conflict. All understood that it was destined to be their last on this earth unless help came.

For two days Wyman had scarcely stirred from where he lay bolstered against the rock. Sometimes he became delirious from fever, uttering incoherent phrases, or swearing in pitiful weakness. Again he would partially arouse to his old sense of soldierly duty, and assume intelligent command. Now he twisted painfully about upon his side, and with clouded eyes, sought to discern what man was lying next him. The face was hidden so that all he could clearly distinguish was the fact that this man was not clothed as a soldier.

"Is that you, Hampton?" he questioned, his voice barely audible. The person thus addressed, who was lying flat upon his back, gazing silently upward at the rocky front of the cliff, turned cautiously over upon his elbow before venturing reply.

"Yes; what is it, sergeant? It looks to be a beauty of a morning way up yonder."

There was a hearty, cheery ring to his clear voice which left the paln-racked old soldier envious. "My God!" he growled savagely. "It is likely to be the last any of us will ever see. Wasn't it you I heard whistling just now? One might imagine this was to be a wedding, rather than a funeral."

"And why not, Wyman? Didn't you know they employed music at both functions nowadays? Besides, it is not every man who is permitted to assist at his own obsequies—the very uniqueness of such a situation rather appeals to my sense of humor."

The sergeant, his teeth clinched tightly to repress the pain-racking him, stifled his resentment with an evident effort. "You may be less light-hearted when you learn that the last of our ammunition is already in the guns," he remarked, stiffly.

"I suspected as much." And the speaker lifted himself on one elbow to

peer down the line of recumbent figures. "To be perfectly frank with you, sergeant, the stuff has held out considerably longer than I believed it would, judging from the way those 'dough boys' of yours kept copping at every shadow in front of them. It's a marvel to me, the mutton-heads they take into the army. Oh, now, you needn't scowl at me like that, Wyman; I've worn the blue, and seen some service where a fellow needed to be a man to sport the uniform. Besides, I'm not indifferent, old chap, and just so long as there remained any work worth attending to in this skirmishing affair, I did it, didn't I? But I tell you, man there is mighty little good trying to buck against Fate, and when Luck once finally lets go of a victim, he's bound to drop straight to the bottom before he stops. That's the sum and substance of all my philosophy, old fellow, consequently I never kick simply because things happen to go wrong. What's the use? They'll go wrong just the same. Consequently, upheld by my acquired philosophy, I'm merely holding back one shot for myself, as a sort of grand finale to this fandango, and another for that little girl out yonder."

These words were uttered slowly, the least touch of a lazy drawl apparent in the low voice, yet there was an earnest simplicity pervading the speech which somehow gave it importance. The man meant exactly what he said, beyond the possibility of a doubt. The old soldier, accustomed to every form of border eccentricity, gazed at him with disapproval.

"Either you're the coolest devil I've met during 20 years of soldiering," he commented, doubtfully, "or else the craziest. Who are you, anyhow? I half believe you might be Bob Hampton, of Placer."

The other smiled grimly. "You have the name tolerably correct, old fellow; likewise that delightful spot so lately honored by my residence. In brief, you have succeeded in calling the turn perfectly, so far as your limited information extends. In strict confidence I propose now to impart to you what has hitherto remained a profound secret. Upon special request of number of influential citizens of Placer, including the city marshal and other officials, expressed in mass-meeting, I have decided upon deserting that sagebrush metropolis to its just fate, and plan to add the influence of my presence to the future development of Glencaid. I learn that the climate there is more salubrious, more conducive to long living, the citizens of Placer being peculiarly excitable and careless with their firearms."

The sergeant had been listening with open mouth. "The hell you say!" he finally ejaculated.

"The undoubted truth, every word of it. No wonder you are shocked. A fine state of affairs, isn't it, when a plain-spoken, pleasant-mannered gentleman, such as I surely am—a university graduate, by all the gods, the nephew of a United States senator, and acknowledged to be the greatest exponent of scientific poker in this territory,—should be obliged to hastily change his chosen place of abode because of the threat of an ignorant and depraved mob. Ever have a rope dangled in front of your eyes, sergeant, and a gun-barrel biting into your cheek at the same time? Accept my word for it, the experience is trying on the nerves. Ran a perfectly square game, too, and those ducks knew it; but there's no true sporting spirit left in this territory any more. However, spilled milk is never worth sobbing over, and Fate always contrives to play the final hand in any game, and stocks the cards to win."

"A breath of good, honest prayer would serve better than anything else," growled the sergeant, soberly. The gray eyes resting thoughtfully on the old soldier's haggard face became instantly grave and earnest. "Sincerely I wish I might aid you with one," the man admitted, "but I fear, old fellow, any prayer coming from my lips would never ascend very far. However, I might try the comfort of a hymn, and you will remember this one, which, no doubt, you have helped to sing back in God's country."

There was a moment's hushed pause, during which a rifle cracked sharply out in the ravine; then the reckless fellow, his head partially supported against the protecting bowlder, lifted up a full, rich baritone in rendition of that hymn of Christian faith—

"Nearer, my God, to Thee! Nearer, my God, to Thee! Even though it be a cross That I must bear, Still all my hope shall be, Nearer, my God, to Thee! Nearer, my God, to Thee!"

Glazed and wearied eyes glanced cautiously toward the singer around the edges of protecting rocks; fingers loosened their grasp upon the rifle barrels; smoke-begrimed cheeks became moist; while lips, a moment before profaned by oaths, grew silent and trembling. Out in front a reverent brave sent his bullet swirling just above the singer's head, the sharp fragments of rock dislodged falling in a shower upon his upturned face; but the fearless rascal sang serenely on to the end, without a quaver.

"Mistake it for a death song likely," he remarked dryly, while the last clear, lingering note, reechoed by the cliff, died reluctantly away in softened cadence. "Beautiful old song, sergeant, and I trust hearing it again has done you good. Sang it once in a church way back in New England. But what is the trouble? Did you call me for some special reason?"

"Yes," came the almost gruff response; for Wyman, the fever stealing back upon him, felt half ashamed of his unshed tears. "That is, provided you retain sufficient sense to listen. Old Gillis was shot over an hour ago, yonder behind that big bowlder, and his girl sits there still holding his head in her lap. She'll get hit also unless somebody pulls her out of there, and she's doing no good to Gillis—he's dead."

Hampton's clear-cut, expressive face became graver, all trace of reckless gaiety gone from it. He lifted his head cautiously, peering over his rock cover toward where he remembered earlier in the fight Gillis had sought refuge.

CHAPTER II. Old Gillis' Girl.

Guided by the unerring instinct of an old Indian fighter, Gillis, during that first mad retreat, had discovered temporary shelter behind one of the largest bowlders. It was a trifle in advance of those later rolled into position by the soldiers, but was of a size and shape which should have afforded ample protection for two, and doubtless would have done so had it not been for the firing from the cliff opposite. Even then it was a deflected bullet, glancing from off the polished surface of the rock, which found lodgment in the sturdy old fighter's brain. The girl had caught him as he fell, had wasted all her treasured store of water in a vain effort to cleanse the blood from his features, and now sat there, pillowing his head upon her knee, although the old man was stone dead with the first touch of the ball. That had occurred fully an hour before, but she continued in the same posture, a grave, pathetic figure, her face sobered and careworn beyond her years, her eyes dry and staring, one brown hand grasping unconsciously the old man's useless rifle. She would scarcely have been esteemed attractive even under much happier circumstances and assisted by dress, yet there was something in the independent poise of her head, the steady firmness of her posture, as he now watched her curiously.

"Fighting blood," he muttered admiringly to himself. "Might fall to develop into very much of a society ball, but likely to prove valuable out here."

She was rather a slender slip of a thing, a trifle too tall for her years, perhaps, yet with no lack of development apparent in the slim, rounded figure. Her coarse home-made dress of dark calico fitted her sadly, while her rumpled hair, from which the broad-brimmed hat had fallen, possessed a reddish copper tinge where it was touched by the sun. Mr. Hampton's survey did not increase his desire for more intimate acquaintance.



If I Select Your Bullet Rather Than the Rocks, What Then?

ship, yet he recognized anew her undoubted claim upon him.

"Suppose I might just as well drop out that way as any other," he reflected, thoughtfully. "It's all in the game." Lying flat upon his stomach, both arms extended, he slowly forced himself beyond his bowlder into the open. There was no great distance to be traversed, and a considerable portion of the way was somewhat protected by low bushes. Hampton took few chances of those spying eyes above, never uplifting his head the smallest fraction of an inch, but reaching forward with blindly groping hands, caught hold upon any projecting root or stone which enabled him to drag his body an inch farther. Twice they fired directly down at him from the opposite summit, and once a feck of sharp rock, clipped by a glancing bullet, embedded itself in his cheek, dyeing the whole side of his face crimson. But not once did he pause or glance aside; nor did the girl look up from the imploring face of her dead. As he crept silently, sheltering himself next to the body of the dead man, she perceived his presence for the first time, and shrank back as if in dread.

"What are you doing? Why—why did you come here?" she questioned, a falter in her voice; and he noticed that her eyes were dark and large, yielding a marked impress of beauty to her face.

"I was unwilling to leave you here alone," he answered, quietly, "and hope to discover some means for getting you safely back beside the others."

"But I didn't want you," and there was a look of positive dislike in her widely opened eyes.

"Didn't want me?" He echoed these unexpected words in a tone of complete surprise. "Surely you could not desire to be left here alone? Why didn't you want me?"

"Because I know who you are!" Her voice seemed to catch in her throat. "He told me. You're the man who shot Jim Eberly."

Mr. Hampton was never of a pronounced emotional nature, nor was he a person easily disconcerted, yet he flushed at the sound of these impulsive words, and the confident smile deserted his lips. For a moment they sat thus, the dead body lying between, and looked at each other. When the man finally broke the constrained silence a deeper intonation had crept into his voice.

"My girl," he said gravely, and not without a suspicion of pleading, "this is no place for me to attempt any defense of a shooting affray in a gambling house, although I might plead with some justice that Eberly enjoyed the honor of shooting first. I was not aware of your personal feeling in the matter, or I might have permitted some one else to come here in my stead. Now it is too late. I have never spoken to you before, and do so at this time merely from a sincere desire to be of some assistance."

There was that in his manner of grave courtesy which served to steady the girl. Probably never before in all her rough frontier experience had she been addressed thus formally. Her closely compressed lips twitched nervously, but her questioning eyes re-

mained unflinched.

"You may stay," she asserted, soberly. "Only don't touch me."

No one could ever realize how much those words hurt him. Not until he had completely conquered his first unwise impulse to retort angrily, did he venture again to speak.

"I hope to aid you in getting back beside the others, where you will be less exposed."

"Will you take him?"

"He is dead," Hampton said, soberly, "and I can do nothing to aid him. But there remains a chance for you to escape."

"Then I won't go," she declared, positively.

Hampton's gray eyes looked for a long moment fixedly into her darker ones, while the two took mental stock of each other. He realized the utter futility of any further argument, while she felt instinctively the cool, dominating strength of the man. Neither was composed of that poor fiber which bends.

"Very well, my young lady," he said, easily, stretching himself out more comfortably in the rock shadow. "Then I will remain here with you; it makes small odds."

Excepting for one hasty, puzzled glance, she did not deign to look again toward him, and the man rested motionless upon his back, staring up at the sky. Finally, curiosity overmastered the actor in him, and he turned partially upon one side, so as to bring her profile within his range of vision. Her dark, glowing eyes were lowered upon the white face of the dead man, yet Hampton noted how clear, in spite of sun-tan, were those tints of health upon the rounded cheek, and how soft and glossy shone her wealth of rumpled hair. Even the tinge of color, so distasteful in the full glare of the sun, appeared to have darkened under the shadow, its shade framing the downcast face into a pensive fairness. Then he observed how dry and parched her lips were.

"Take a drink of this," he insisted heartily, holding out toward her as he spoke his partially filled canteen.

She started at the unexpected sound of his voice, yet uplifted the welcome water to her mouth, while Hampton, observing it all closely, could but remark the delicate shapeliness of her hand.

"If that old fellow was her father," he reflected soberly, "I should like to have seen her mother."

"Thank you," she said simply, handing back the canteen, but without lifting her eyes again to his face. "It was so thirsty." Her low tone, endeavoring to be polite enough, contained no note of encouragement.

"Was Gillis your father?" the man questioned, determined to make her recognize his presence.

"I suppose so; I don't know."

"You don't know? Am I to understand you are actually uncertain whether this man was your father or not?"

"That is about what I said, wasn't it? Not that it is any of your business, so far as I know, Mr. Bob Hampton, but I answered you all right. He brought me up, and I called him 'dad' about as far back as I can remember, but I don't reckon as he ever told me he was my father. So you can understand just what you please."

"His name was Gillis, wasn't it?"

The girl nodded wearily.

"Post-trader at Fort Bethune?"

Again the rumpled head silently acquiesced.

"What is your name?"

"He always called me 'Kid,' she admitted unwillingly, "but I reckon if you have any further occasion for addressing me, you'd better say 'Miss Gillis.'"

"Heaven preserve me!" he exclaimed good naturedly, "but you are certainly laying it on thick, young lady! However, I believe we might become good friends if we ever have sufficient luck to get out from this hole alive. Damn it I don't sort of cotton to you, little girl—you've got some sand."

For a brief space her truthful, angry eyes rested scornfully upon his face, her lips parted as though trembling with a sharp retort. Then she deliberately turned her back upon him without uttering a word.

thing beheld a chaos, every thing before worthless,—for years he had been actually seeking death; a hundred times he had gladly marked its apparent approach, a smile of welcome upon his lips. Yet it had never quite succeeded in reaching him, and nothing had been gained beyond a reputation for cool, reckless daring, which he did not in the least covet. But now, miracle of all miracles, just as the end seemed actually attained, seemed beyond any possibility of being turned aside, he began to experience a desire to live—he wanted to save this girl.

His keenly observant eyes, trained by the exigencies of his trade to take note of small things, and rendered eager by this newly awakened ambition, scanned the cliff towering above them. He perceived the extreme irregularity of its front, and numerous peculiarities of formation which had escaped him hitherto. Suddenly his puzzled face brightened to the birth of an idea. By heavens! it might be done! Surely it might be done! Inch by inch he traced the obscure passage seeking to impress such faint detail upon his memory—that narrow ledge within easy reach of an unextended arm, the sharp outcropping of rock-edges here and there, the deep gash as though some giant ax had cleaved the stone, those sturdy cedars growing straight out over the chasm like the bowsprits of ships, while all along the way, irregular and ragged, varied rifts not entirely unlike the steps of a crazy staircase.

The very conception of such an exploit caused his flesh to creep. But he was not of that class of men who fall back dazed before the face of danger. Again and again, led by an impulse he was unable to resist, he studied that precipitous rock, every nerve tingling to the newborn urge. God helping them, even so desperate a deed might be accomplished, although it would test the foot and nerve of a Swiss mountaineer. He glanced again uneasily toward his companion, and saw the same motionless figure, the same somber face turned deliberately away. Hampton did not smile, but his square jaw set, and he clinched his hands. He had no fear that she might fall him, but for the first time in all his life he questioned his own courage.

CHAPTER III. Between Life and Death.

The remainder of that day, as well as much of the gloomy night following, composed a silent, lingering horror. The fierce pangs of hunger no longer gnawed, but a dull apathy now held the helpless defenders. One of the wounded died, a mere lad, sobbing pitifully for his mother; an infantryman, peering forth from his covert, had been shot in the face, and his scream echoed among the rocks in multiplied accents of agony; while Wyman lay tossing and moaning, mercifully unconscious. The others rested in their places, scarcely venturing to stir a limb, their roving, wolfish eyes the only visible evidence of remaining life, every hope vanished, yet each man clinging to his assigned post of duty in desperation. There was but little firing—the defenders nursing their slender stock, the savages holding their time. When night shut down the latter became bolder, and taunted cruelly those destined to become so soon their hapless victims. Twice the maddened men fired recklessly at those dancing devils, and one pitched forward, emitting a howl of pain that caused his comrades to cower once again behind their covers. One and all these frontiersmen recognized the inevitable—before dawn the end must come. No useless words were spoken; the men merely clinched their teeth and waited.

Hampton crept closer in beside the girl while the shadows deepened, and ventured to touch her hand. Perhaps the severe strain of their situation, the intense loneliness of that Indian-haunted twilight, had somewhat softened her resentment, for she made no effort now to repulse him.

"Kid," he said at last, "are you game for a try at getting out of this?"

She appeared to hesitate over her answer, and he could feel her tumultuous breathing. Some portion of her aversion had vanished.

"Come, Kid," he ventured finally, yet with new assurance vibrating in his low voice; "this is surely a poor time and place for any indulgence in tantrums, and you've got more sense. I'm going to try to climb up the face of that cliff yonder,—it's the only possible way out from here,—and I propose to take you along with me."

She snatched her hand roughly away, yet remained facing him. "Who gave you any right to decide what I should do?"

The man clasped his fingers tightly about her slender arm, advancing his face until he could look squarely into hers. She read in the lines of that determined countenance a flexible resolve which overmastered her.

"The right given by Almighty God to protect any one of your sex in peril," he replied. "Before dawn those savage fiends will be upon us. We are utterly helpless. There remains only one possible path for escape, and I believe I have discovered it. Now, my girl, you either climb those rocks with me, or I shall kill you where you are. It is that, or the Sioux torture. I have two shots left in this gun,—one for you, the other for myself. The time has come for deciding which of these alternatives you prefer."

"If I select your bullet rather than the rocks, what then?"

"You will get it, but in that case you will die like a fool."

"You have believed me to be one, all this afternoon."

"Possibly," he admitted; "your words and actions certainly justified some such conclusion, but the opportunity has arrived for causing me to revise that suspicion."



Never Once Did the Man Loosen His Grasping Grip of His Companion.

"Come on, then," he whispered, his fingers grasping her sleeve.

She shook off the restraining touch of his hand as if it were contamination and sank down upon her knees beside the inert body. He could barely perceive the dim outlines of her bowed figure, yet never moved, his breath perceptibly quickening, while he watched and waited. Without word or moan she bent yet lower and pressed her lips upon the cold, white face. The man caught no more than the faintest echo of a murmured "Good-by, old dad; I wish I could take you with me." Then she stood stiffly upright, feeling him. "I'm ready now," she announced calmly. "You can go on ahead."

The crept among low shrubs and around the bowlders, carefully guarding every slightest movement lest some rustle of disturbed foliage, or sound of loosened stone, might warn the fire of those keen watchers. Every inch of their progress was attained through tedious groping, yet the distance to be traversed was short, and Hampton soon found himself pressing against the uprising precipice. Against that background of dark cliff they might venture to stand erect, the faint glimmer of reflected light barely sufficient to reveal to each the shadowy outline of the other.

"Don't move an inch from this spot," he whispered. "It wouldn't be a square deal, Kid, to leave those poor fellows to their death without even telling them there's a chance to get out."

She attempted no reply, as he glided noiselessly away, but her face, could he have seen it, was not devoid of expression. This was an act of generosity and delicate courage of the very kind most apt to appeal to her nature, and within her secret heart there was rapidly developing a respect for this man, who with such calm assurance won his own way. Then, suddenly, that black curtain was rent by jagged spurts of red and yellow flame. Dazed for an instant, her heart throbbing wildly to the sharp reports of the rifles, she shrank covering back, her fascinated gaze fixed on those limp-like figures leaping forward from rock to rock. Almost with the flash and sound Hampton sprang hastily back and gathered her in his arms.

"Catch hold, Kid, anywhere; only go up, and quick!"

She retained no longer any memory of Hampton; her brain was completely terrorized. Inch by inch, foot by foot, clinging to a fragment of rock here, grasping a slippery branch there, occasionally helped by encountering a deeper gash in the face of the precipice, her movements concealed by the scattered cedars, she toiled feverishly up. The first time she became aware that Hampton was closely following was when her feet slipped along a naked root, and she would have plunged headlong into unknown depths had she not come in sudden contact with his supporting shoulder. Faint and dizzy, and trembling like a leaf of an aspen, she crept forward onto a somewhat wider ledge of thin rock, and lay there quivering painfully from head to foot. A moment of suspense, and he was outstretched beside her, resting at full length along the very outer edge, his hand closing tightly over her own.

"Remain perfectly quiet," he whispered, panting heavily. "We can be no safer anywhere else."

Shots and yells, the dull crash of blows, the shouts of men engaged in a death grapple, the sharp crackling of innumerable rifles, the inarticulate moans of pain, the piercing scream of sudden torture, were borne upward to them from out the blackness. All at once the hideous uproar ceased with a final yelping of triumph, seemingly reechoed the entire length of the chasm, in the midst of which one single voice pleaded pitifully,—only to die away in a shriek. The two agonized fugitives lay listening, their ears strained to catch the slightest sound from below. Hampton's ears could discern evidences of movement, and he heard guttural voices calling at a distance, but to the vision all was black.

These uncertain sounds ceased, the strained ears of the fugitives heard the crashing of bodies through the thick scrubbery, and then even this noise died away in the distance. Yet neither ventured to stir or speak. It may be that the girl slept fitfully, worn out by long vigil and intense strain; but the man proved less fortunate, his eyes staring out continually into the black void, his thoughts upon other days. His features were drawn and haggard when the first gray dawn found ghastly reflection along the opposite rock summit, and with blurred eyes he watched the faint tinge of returning light steal downward into the canyon. At last it swept aside those lower clinging mists, as though some invisible hand had drawn back the night curtains, and he peered over the edge of his narrow resting place, gazing directly down upon the scene of massacre. With a quick gasp of unspeakable horror he shrank so sharply back as to cause the suddenly awakened girl to start and glance into his face.

"What is it?" she questioned, with quick catching of breath, reading that

Continued on Sixth Page.—Ed. Cui.